THE

# CHRISTIAN IN THE CHURCH.

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# THE CHRISTIAN IN THE CHURCH.

"THAT THOU MAYEST KNOW HOW THOU OUGHTEST TO BEHAVE THYSELF IN THE HOUSE OF GOD, WHICH IS THE CHURCH OF THE LIVING GOD, THE PILLAR AND GROUND OF THE TRUTH."

PAUL.

A Christian is the highest style of man!
And is there, who the blessed cross wipes off,
As a foul blot, from his dishonoured brow?
If angels tremble, 'tis at such a sight.—YOUNG.

IT is no design of these pages to discuss the question, What constitutes a church? The church of the living God, in the past ages of human history, has existed and prospered under so many dispensations, and under so many disadvantages; and the words of our Lord Jesus Christ are so simple and explicit—when he declares *first*, that God's

worshippers may worship any where in spirit and in truth; and *next*, that where two or three are met in his name, he will be with them—that we think no simple-minded reader of the Bible need be at any loss to find THE CHURCH.

WHAT constitutes a Church?
Not Roman basilic or Gothic pile,
With fretted roof, tall spire, or long-drawn aisle,
These only mock thy search;
Fantastic sepulchres when all is said!
Seek not the living Church among the dead.

What is a Church, indeed?
Not tripled hierarchy, or throned priest,
The stolen trappings of the Romish beast,
Altar, or well-sung creed,
Rites magical to save, to sanctify,
Nor aught that lulls the ear, or lures the eye.

A band of faithful men,
Met for God's worship in an upper room
Or canopied by midnight's starry dome,
On hill side, or lone glen,
To hear the counsels of his Holy Word,
Pledged to each other and their common Lord;

These, few as they may be,
Compose a Church, such as in pristine age
Defied the tyrant's zeal, the bigot's rage:—
For where but two or three
Whatever place in Faith's communion meet,
There, with Christ's presence, is a Church complete.

It is not in brick and mortar, not in splendid ceremonies, not in the gorgeous apparelling of officiating priests, not in crowds of admiring auditors, that we must look for the Church of the living God. The church is the pillar and ground of the truth; and where the TRUTH is, in its vindication of God's holy word, in its reverence for God himself, in its clear exhibitions of his holy law, of man's condition as a sinner, and of the divine wrath upon the guilty; in full proclamations of Christ, his dignity, his person, his work, and his grace; and in fervent urgencies of a holy life, as useful on earth, and as preparing for a holy heaven; wherever this truth is, there is the Church. Departure

from truth is departure from God; and where, in any man or body of men, the defection from the truth is most complete, and the love of error has fullest possession, there the apostasy from the church of the living God is most entire.

But the church of God is not abstract truth. It is living, operating truth; truth exhibiting its influence over men; transforming, moulding, elevating personal character; regulating, guiding, and controlling personal conduct; and giving and sustaining exalted and holy hopes. The abstract teachings of Divine truth, as drawn forth from the Scriptures, are the model of the church, and the guide in personal piety; but the piety belongs, of course, to the individual. The church is the congregation of individuals, professing to hold the truth, and to be influenced by its power, and promising submission to its dictates. The visible church

of God is composed upon earth of those who profess to hold the truth as God has revealed it, and who associate for his worship, together with their children. This congregation of professed believers is nearly as old as our race; existing, indeed, before the fall, in Adam's holy principles of love and obedience; and taking its present form of a redeemed church, and establishing its worship and ordinances accordingly, when God gave a promise of Messiah's coming, and our guilty parents, in faith and penitence, received the first proclamation of the gospel, and relied upon it. Existing under different dispensations, with a greater or less measure of external and internal prosperity, with a larger or a smaller amount and clearness of revealed truth, this body of believers —the church of God—has, from the first, possessed the vital and essential principles which distinguish the church; the same

one object of worship, the same purity of law, the same grace of the gospel, the same Mediatorial Head, the same instrumentality of faith, the same exalted hopes; and these principles have ever exhibited the same instrumental efficacy to renew the heart, and to control the life of man.

Our chief design in these pages is to exhibit briefly the duty of a church member towards this body of believers, the church. Before proceeding to this, we crave a short indulgence to present two important thoughts.

FIRST, Every man should reflect upon the design of the church of God, should keep that design in full view, and should use his constant and earnest endeavours to promote it.

SECONDLY, Every man should carefully ponder and review the grounds of obligation to call forth his efforts.

There is a threefold object in the congregating of God's people in the church.

First, and including all others in itself alone, the church is established for the GLORY OF GOD. This must be kept plainly and constantly before our minds, so that no doctrines be held, and no practices indulged, and no measures adopted, except such as are accordant with his will, and calculated to promote his honour.

Secondly, the church is designed to promote piety in the hearts of its members. Man is a social being, and the church secures for religious purposes the advantages of his social nature. No Christian is a solitary being. As a member of the church, he supports and encourages his brethren, while he is himself animated and strengthened by them to acquire and advocate and practise holy principles.

Thirdly, the church of God, especially under the present dispensation of it, is an aggressive institution. Every member of it

is expected to use his influence and exertions to bring others to the enjoyment of the same privileges, and to the discharge of the same duties with himself.

Let these matters be kept in view by every church-member: his own spiritual good and that of his brethren in every respect, the conversion of souls to God, and the glory of Jehovah, as the great design of all; and then will he indeed "adorn the doctrine of God his Saviour," among men.

The grounds of obligation for each church-member may also be considered as threefold.

First, there is a natural obligation to know and love and obey God, arising from man's very being, and from the relation which man, as a creature and as a sinner, sustains to him. The obligation to obey the laws of the church, as the ordinance of God, rests upon every man that hears the gospel, and is antecedent to all consent on his part. It is an-

alogous to a man's duty to his country or to his parents. His consent is not needful to impose an obligation, but his refusal is criminal. Because of this, the gospel denounces its woe upon every unbeliever.

Secondly, every member of the church, expressly or by implication, has made a voluntary acknowledgment of his duty, and a voluntary profession to assume its discharge. It is natural to expect that where these voluntary assumptions are made of duties so important, there should be an earnest care to meet them.

Thirdly, no man has a just view of the duties of the church of God, who does not regard every duty as a privilege. This is the just light in which a mind, thoroughly prepared for any station, will look upon the engagements that station involves; and as love is a special preparative for religious duties, surely no man is ready to take his

place as a member of the church of God, who does not regard the opportunity and its succeeding duties as delightful privileges, which he has no desire to forego. So the Scriptures speak of the kingdom of Heaven as a feast. No doubt it is a man's duty to eat for the support of his natural life, yet scarcely ever a man seats himself at a bountiful board from mere considerations of duty, and reflecting how wrong it would be to starve himself. What men wish to do may be their duty, yet it is not as a task, but as a privilege, that they engage in it.

But leaving these matters, we proceed to inquire, What is the duty of a church-member in reference to the church of God?

I. When a man voluntarily becomes a member of the church of Christ, he should sincerely entertain the belief and hope of his own conversion to God. It is indeed unreasonable to require that every man

should be a settled and steadfast Christian before he ventures to enter the church; this would be like requiring a child to be educated before he enters a school. For, as a school is designed to educate the ignorant, so the church is designed to strengthen the weak, and to protect the feeble. If a man sincerely judges and hopes that he loves God, however feebly, and with this hope forms the cheerful and settled purpose of serving God as he is required by the gospel, then he should profess these hopes and assume these obligations by uniting with the church. The evidences of personal conversion we do not now design to consider. If any man judges that he is not a Christian, his FIRST DUTY is to flee to Christ for the pardon of his sins and the renewal of his heart. Unwilling to do this, he will but impose upon his own conscience, and bring reproach upon the church, by venturing to become a professing member. No

one can comfortably or honourably sustain an unreal character. Professing to be what he really is not, must render any man unhappy when he is undeceived; and must produce a bad impression upon others who detect his error, even if he does not. The church is the home of piety, and only the man who hopes he is pious, and who resolves to live for God's service, should maintain a membership in his church.

Let two things be distinctly understood concerning this matter. *First*, no man who hears the call of the gospel, can innocently decline to become a member of the church. Every man is bound to obey God; as truly bound to obey his commands in the gospel, as any other commands; as truly bound to obey an ecclesiastical government within its proper sphere, as a civil or parental government in their due bounds. The only thing to keep any man out of the church is per

sonal unfitness, and, as this unfitness is always moral, so it is his sin, and cannot be either his apology or his exculpation. No man can innocently refuse or neglect to acknowledge the claims of Christ, or be justified in declining to enter the church; and let every one who stands in this position feel the responsibility resting upon him as a continual rebel against God. The only open door of escape from this sinful estate is, "repentance towards God, and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ." *Secondly*, when a man has once entered this relation and become before God and men a member of the church, it is impossible innocently to retire from this position, and to return to the world. The vow which the soul makes in devoting himself to God, is like the vow of marriage; when once it has passed the lips, it cannot be recalled, and guilt alone can annul the bond. If any man finds, after en-

tering the church of Christ, that he has no true piety, let him understand that he cannot forsake his standing as a member for that reason. He is now only where his duty requires him to be, at all events; if he is wrongfully in the church, it is through his sin, and the proper remedy is, not to make that sin worse by abandoning the path of duty, but to pursue the only course in which happiness and safety lie, to repent of every sin, and to seek that pardoning mercy which can fit him for rightly maintaining his place as a professed follower of Christ.

If, indeed, any man in the church deliberately resolves to cherish his sins and to turn his back upon Christ and salvation, common honesty requires that he should surrender his profession of piety, and let the world know that he has apostatized. We would do all we could to dissuade a soul from a step so awful in itself, so dishonouring to

God, so reproachful to religion, and so perilous to his immortal interests. But if the hardened sinner will go, let him go. Let the church be set free from further reproach on his account; let him go out from us as one that is not of us; let all men know, "this man began to build and was not able to finish;" and let his own conscience bear his responsibility as an apostate from truth and from duty and from Christ.

But far different from this should be the course adopted by any one who feels unworthy of his church-membership, and is troubled on this account. There is no need that he should either retire from the church, or even, ordinarily, publish his error. As the wrong is in himself, in his own lack of true repentance and of a sound conversion, let him apply for these to God. Let him take up the subject of personal salvation as one that never knew it; let him humble him-

self before God, and let him feel that he has enlisted in Christ's service for life, and dare not draw back, and desires not to draw back, and WILL NOT. Let him rely upon those precious promises which no humbled and penitent soul ever pleads in vain. The deeper his sense of responsibility and wretchedness, the more urgently should he apply to Christ; and the very unhappiness of his situation, as an unconverted member of the church, may be blessed by the Spirit of God as a more effectual means of making him flee to the only refuge.

Thus far concerning the first duty of him who voluntarily applies for a place in the church. Let him consider his own case, and apply as one who hopes he is truly a Christian.

II. A second duty is to make a prayerful and deliberate choice of that body of Christians, with whom he will enter into church fellowship.

The church of Christ, as it exists among us, is divided into many denominations, and is called by many names. No doubt much evil, but we hope also some good, springs from these diversities. We do not now attempt to discuss any of these differences, to express disapprobation of one or approval of another. Sufficient is it for our present purpose to say that this state of things exists, that some of these communities are nearer the truth than others, and that that church which most fully and solely embraces the truth will most largely bless its own members, and will influence society the most beneficially through them. When any man contemplates uniting with the church, he must consider these matters as they are; and he should seriously inquire, Where can I most truly glorify God, prosper my own soul, and bless the world? The question of connection is often, indeed, virtually settled by the Pro-

vidence which has given a man his early education and baptism, or his first serious impressions with a certain body of believers. And when a man is disposed to go beyond this, his inquiries must generally be superficial. For a man who is himself but a babe in Christ, a disciple just about to enter this high school where he expects to learn such lessons of eternal wisdom, one who has himself acquired but the first principles and is now desirous of going on to perfection, cannot be expected to embrace a wide range in those discussions, by which individual churches defend their peculiar views. But in each case there should be some acquaintance made with the doctrine and order of the body with which the believer connects himself, and a comparison of these with the only infallible standard of truth—the sacred word of God. No man should be required by the government of any church to understand all

her teachings before he enters her communion; this, again, would be to require education in a scholar to qualify him for school. Yet there ought to be knowledge sufficient for the groundwork of faith, and enough to allow the man to say that he has somewhat considered the subject, and that he intelligently regards the formularies of that particular church as agreeable to the Scriptures. The entire submission of his mind to every minute statement of any uninspired formulary should not be rigorously demanded. Yet if there is a point of actual dissent from the received views of any church, an upright man will make this distinctly known at the outset. The difference may not be such as to mar his comfort or usefulness.

A Christian should make neither too much nor too little of existing differences between the churches. On the one hand, that body

of believers which most nearly holds the entire truth, will most advance the real interests of piety; and on the other hand, the vital doctrines of piety are taught in many pulpits, and the smile of God, in the conversion of precious souls, is granted to different churches. Every church, to secure its own purity and prosperity, should require all officers and teachers of that church, intelligently to adopt its entire standards; but in receiving persons to private membership, the first inquiry should be as to personal piety, and then as to his receiving in the general the views of that church. Every individual should seek his connection where, in his judgment, the truth of God is most honoured; where he can be most edified and comfortable; and where he can be useful to others. If there is substantial agreement in the great truths and principles of piety, it seems wrong that there should not be chris-

tian communion in the service of a common Lord. And if any man in his place of residence, has the choice of different worshipping assemblies, let him, in the fear of God, calmly judge which is most according to the teachings of the Scriptures, and let him attach himself to that body.

III. When a man enters the communion of a church, let him feel his obligation to discharge the duties incumbent on him as a member.

Let not the important principle be forgotten that these duties are obligatory upon every man, without regard to his voluntary assumption of them. But there is a new aspect of them, following a man's actual profession of religion. In the view of the world, he is now identified with Christians, and even with the honour of Christ himself, so that he should walk more carefully, lest the name of God and his doctrine should be

blasphemed through his sin. Surely a man cannot be too careful of his conduct, lest he should bring reproach upon piety. And he can adorn the gospel only by fully living up to it. We express it as a mature conviction, that no man can sustain a course of conduct inconsistent with his own character. Therefore let every Christian carefully maintain all those private duties of religion, which in one sense are concealed from the eyes of men, but which in another sense are easily discerned by all men. No man can see you pray in your closet; no man can know the thoughts of your heart; but the life you lead will tell the tale upon you, for a deserted closet and a neglected heart. So the Scriptures say: "Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are *the issues of life*:" and, "Enter into thy closet ... and thy Father which seeth in secret *will reward thee openly*." You may not see it, as Moses knew

not that his face shone from communion with God; but by the presence or absence of a holy temper can men learn, how faithful or unfaithful you have been to private duties.

Let it be the care of every believer to undertake and perform all the duties expected of a Christian. No man should be more careful than he to learn what are the duties of life; no man should put himself to more pains to discharge them; no one should more avoid the very appearance of evil; and he should exemplify in his temper and conduct those special requirements of the christian religion which differ so much from the maxims of an ungodly world. Let the Christian take up, for example, the requirements of the moral law, and with self-examination, at intervals of frequent recurrence, demand of his own heart, in what respects he has failed to observe its precepts and its

spirit. Let him never allow that any contrasts on the score of morality, between him and another man, shall result in reproach upon the name of Christ. Yet let not his carefulness be the mere result of policy. A Christian cannot be too careful to prevent reproach against his religion, but his uprightness and morality should proceed from those sterling principles which christianity so well teaches, and which lead him to act as purely and truly when the world does not see, as when it does. The consistent Christian never thinks of doing otherwise than right; or if a temptation to evil enters his mind, it is suppressed, not for its shame but for its sin; not for policy, but for principle's sake. Piety has but little hold upon that man who weighs a sin in a dubious balance, and turns the scale by the politic inquiry, "*What will people think?*" Such a consideration may sometimes determine what is a

Christian's duty in matters of doubtful propriety, for we must avoid the very appearance of evil; and we must sometimes decline to do a thing which is not in itself wrong, because it may be misunderstood, and may leave an impression unfavourable to the gospel. But in matters which in themselves are plainly wrong, not feeling, nor policy, but principle should always dictate a Christian's course.

We urge principle as the proper spring of christian duty, both because it is the just spring, and because even in pious minds, we cannot always depend upon inclination. The Christian in this life is not perfectly holy. He has still within him a life that needs to be mortified, and desires and propensities that need to be curbed, and he is liable to the attacks of dangerous temptation. The christian life is one of faith, self-denial, and mortification. Many a thing a Christian

would like to do, but he must not; many a sacrifice, which he would wish to avoid, he must make. "Even Christ pleased not himself;" and the circle of things is almost infinitely wider, where we need, more than he, to deny ourselves. There are many duties, where our principles point one way, and our inclinations would drag us another. The voice of duty is to be regarded, let what will withstand; and it is not seldom true that faith is more illustrious because it contends with the most serious and urgent difficulties both of feeling and sight. It is recorded in praise of Abraham, that, at one period of his life, "against hope he believed in hope;" and that, at another, he schooled a father's tenderest feelings into entire submission to a mysterious command, and "he that had received the promises, offered up his only begotten son."

There are some duties which the world

especially expects to see performed by men professing piety, and a Christian should ever meet these just expectations. Other men, indeed, are guilty before God for failing to discharge any of the duties of pious life. But the duties which especially sustain the church and the worship of God, are more directly expected of those that profess piety. We, who profess to be governed by unseen and eternal realities, should, to say the least, not regard the duties which bear directly on our eternal interests, as of inferior importance. The support of the church and of religious institutions; attendance upon public worship with regular punctuality; care for the well being of Zion; and earnest efforts for the prosperity of the church, are the least things that can be expected of those that profess to love the Lord. What a disgrace to a christian profession, when the man who makes it has no ardent attachment

to the sanctuary, and maintains no family altar, and is seldom seen in the place of social prayer!

IV. No man will ever maintain an exemplary church-membership, unless he feels a special responsibility for his individual character and individual conduct.

Perhaps the completeness of individual responsibility would be most fully felt if each man should ask himself, What should be my spirit and conduct were I the only Christian in the world? We are all too prone to wait for each other, and chameleon-like, our piety takes its complexion from surrounding circumstances. This is not as it should be. Measuring ourselves by ourselves, we are not wise. Duty is right, with the support of others, or without that support; nor should we fail in it, even if we stand alone. It is a common thing for men to excuse their remissness because others too

are remiss. Just principles rather dictate that the more remiss others are, the more needful it is that we should not copy a bad example; and, indeed, the very fact that we recognize their delinquency makes us more inexcusable in the same guilt—"Thou that judgest another, doest the same things." So far as principles are concerned, the duty of each Christian is the same as it would be if there was no other pious man in the world but himself. There was a time when God left only one pious family, and possibly but one pious man upon earth; and Noah stood up against his generation—an example of illustrious faith. And many a time since has God left individual Christians to act for themselves with every body against them. Perhaps every man is placed in circumstances of peculiar responsibility, at different times of life, where he must decide and act as if he stood entirely alone. It is not true, in-

deed, so far as the details of duty are concerned, that a Christian is as if he were alone in the world. For there is an unspeakable advantage in having others like-minded with ourselves, in dividing the duties of the christian life, and in being supported by the sympathies and prayers and efforts of others. The church is designed to give greater influence and efficacy to christian principles, by making our piety social; and in this body, the church, there are many members, and all members have not the same office. It is the duty of one man to preach, and not ordinarily the duty of another. The details of duty would differ; but as to principle, every Christian is as much bound to take an interest in every religious thing, and to spend his strength and influence and affections in promoting the Saviour's cause, as if he were the only Christian on earth. He may not be called

upon to preach; but who can give a reason why he should not take as much interest in preaching as the preacher, and long as much for the success of the gospel? He may not see as much disregard of his Lord's authority; but why should he not be as jealous for the honour of God's law, and be as deeply grieved when its authority is disregarded? He may lament over the inconsistencies of professed believers; and if he stood alone, this source of sorrow, at least, would be removed; but surely his principles are not falsified, nor the obligations of his duty lessened, by their misconduct. No one can imagine a single just reason why every Christian should not feel his individual responsibilities, as if he alone was responsible.

Suppose that a minister of the gospel stood forth in a community of sinful men, supported only by one single professed believer in the gospel. How ought that single

Christian to demean himself? Making all due allowance for hindrances of duty plainly providential, what an exemplary man should he be! Should a gainsaying world ever be able to say of him, that he was unkind in his family, or unfaithful to family duties; that he had no family altar, and no control over his children, and no care for their salvation? Should he be of an ungovernable and hasty temper, quarrelsome in the world, tenacious of his rights, revengeful for injuries, and unforgiving of all insults? To say nothing of suspicions of impurity in his life, should such a man be chargeable with the trickeries of trade, with unfaithfulness to his engagements, with delinquency in defraying his honest indebtedness, or with indolence in his lawful business? Should fraud, or falsehood, or a grasping spirit, ever be fastened as a reproach upon this solitary representative in the community of the

cause of Christ? Ought he to permit the world to say, "We have men among us more careful of truth and honour and honesty than this man?"

But in other matters: if a pastor had but one pious hearer, should not that man hear every sermon; attend every prayer meeting; contribute, as the Lord has prospered him, in every charitable collection; sustain and support and sympathize in every good work to which the pastor lays his hand; and feel that men were looking upon him as a living epistle, where they might read the glory or the shame of religion itself? And how would the feeblest church in the land arise and shine if every Christian felt this individual responsibility! We verily believe that if, in the largest congregation that can be found, there were but twenty persons, and these the poorest and least influential of all, who yet were fully alive to their duties and

responsibilities, and who with deep humility and earnest prayerfulness and holy devotion to the Saviour, endeavoured to adorn the gospel in all things, a holy influence would go forth through them that would awaken the attention of a slumbering church and a careless world, and that would fill the most capacious sanctuary with anxious inquirers, to know what marvellous power had filled their hearts. It is impossible to overrate the power of holy living to testify for God, and to impress the consciences of men. It is wrong for the church to depend so much upon the zeal or eloquence or efforts of any preacher, to extend the gospel in the community around. God makes his people witnesses; a holy life is the needful supplement to any preaching, and the best commentary upon its excellence; and upon every Christian is binding the spirit of the command, Go ye, disciple others! A holy life in each

man is the best proof that he sits under holy teachings, and belongs to a holy Master. And what is a holy life? "Keep thy heart with all diligence," is the first lesson of it: "Every one of us must give an account of himself to God," is a principle it never loses sight of; and the discharge of every duty, in its own place and proportion, rendering unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's, and to God the things that are God's; this makes a holy life.

And now, so far as principles are concerned, is not every man thus bound, as truly and thoroughly as if he stood alone in the community or in the world, a solitary Christian? The details of duty may, indeed, change through the influence of his associates in the church; but unquestionably the remissness of others should increase, rather than diminish his engagements, and should make him more circumspect than if he stood

alone. The entire influence of his connection with a body of other believers, should be to quicken and not to retard every duty, to strengthen and not to weaken every bond of obligation. What a low idea of his duty in the church must that man have, who can suppose that the holiness of his heart, that the cultivation of his mind, that the purpose of his will, that the carefulness of his conduct, that his zeal, or his benevolence, or his self-denial, or his anxiety to save souls, may be any the less, because others share with him his privileges and his responsibilities! The plain design of the church, as a body of believers, is to give us all the advantages of united power. It takes away no responsibility; and every man misunderstands and abuses his connection with the church, who, by his church-membership, is rendered less careful of his own heart, and less zealous in any duty. We had better be without a church,

and let every man act for himself in the service of God, unless this holy institution operates as a help, and not as a hindrance, to every individual duty.

There is one sense in which, indeed, a man's connection with the church of Christ may be said to diminish his responsibility. It is always less responsibility for a man to do his duty, than it is to refuse or neglect it. But duty itself remains the same, and no man can evade its obligations; nor will any right thinking man wish to shake off its responsibilities. For responsibility, justly felt, is always of salutary influence; and to feel the weight of it, may make us more holy and useful. When a man walks carefully in the way of his duty, let him banish undue anxiety; let him be fearless of consequences; let him enjoy peace of conscience; and let every humble follower of the Lord Jesus Christ possess all the privileges that flow

from faith in the great Redeemer. But it is neither an actual nor a desirable privilege for a believer to be set free from his obedience to the holy law of God. We make not the law void through faith, but rather establish it. For the gospel is as holy, in spirit and in precept, as the law, and has sweeter motives urging our obedience. The awful responsibility of sin no longer rests upon the believer; "for there is now therefore no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus." But the serious responsibilities of duty still rest upon him, and ever must. It is a great mistake for any man to suppose that the church is designed as a place of rest, so that having "joined the church," as the phrase goes, a man may relax his interest, his prayers, his zealous efforts. The church, to every true member, is a refuge from sin and from God's wrath, but not from earnest efforts to please God, and to

further our salvation. The Christian is a soldier, and the Christian's life a warfare. And, indeed, the man who feels as he should, ought not to wish that any of the responsibilities for duty should be relaxed. If the design of the church is to glorify God, to bless your own soul, and the souls of his people, and the souls of sinful men; if your whole heart is set on accomplishing this great design, then ought you not to desire any responsibility so removed as to suffer you to relax from duty. You are certainly wrong if your connection with the church has made you less earnest, less prayerful, less careful of sinning against God, less ardent in any good thing. Is this the way to glorify God, to become more holy, to strengthen the hands of your brethren, and to impress solemnly the minds of the unconverted? There can be no question that men make this mistake; that some persons are "at ease

in Zion," are resting securely in the church, as they would not dare to rest, with precisely the same conduct and character, if they were out of the church. But such a delusion as this should be broken up. Carelessness of truth, negligence of duty, remissness in prayer—such influence as this the church was never designed to exert upon any soul. It is not the legitimate home of the sluggard. It is the rightful abode of souls who see their duty clearer than other men, and are better disposed for its discharge; of men who do not wish to be set free from God's law of holiness; but who see that God's glory and man's good are best promoted, when that law is most honoured and fulfilled. Thus the church is the pillar and ground of the truth, for all her teachings and influences are holy; and every man who behaves himself rightly in the church, will cheerfully recognize his responsibilities; and the more

he knows of duty, the more humble, diligent and earnest will he be in its discharge.

V. In conclusion, it may be important to notice the just line of distinction, between those that are humble, believing members of the church of Christ, and those that are not. Many persons shrink back from making a profession of piety, on the ground that it is an awful responsibility. In our view, it is a much more dreadful responsibility to stand back from Christ, than to flee to him and to engage heartily in his service. The natural obligations of believers and unbelievers are the same. All are creatures of the same God, bound by the same law, called by the same gospel, having a like immortality, and going forward to the same judgment-seat. But if the believer is no longer under condemnation, he has much less responsibility than the impenitent man. Neither of them can be relieved of the respon-

sibility of duty; but the unbeliever, while thus he is required by a holy law to do the very things demanded of the believer, has in addition the awful responsibility of past and present sinfulness, and of continued rebellion against God. What ground of congratulation has the sinner? Or why should he shrink back from the humble discharge of duty, as if it implied responsibilities superior and too weighty to bear? The principles of duty, laid upon man by God, are not altered by man's penitence or impenitence. The duties of the believer and of the unbeliever are the same. If the one is bound to love God, so is the other; if the one ought to pray, so should the other; if the one should be holy, so should the other; if the one should labour for God's glory and the good of souls, so should the other. It is true, the impenitent sinner does not profess to fear God, or to keep his law; and he

claims due credit for consistency at least. But is it any credit to a traitor, that his plans are openly and thoroughly treasonable; or to a disobedient son, that he is consistent in dishonouring his parents? The consistency of a sinner only makes him more openly an enemy to God; it takes away no measure of his obligation; it lays upon him the responsibility of open and flagrant sin.

What a blessed thing it is that, while God's law binds every conscience without respect to position or profession, the gospel proffers its mercy without respect to character! The impenitent sinner is just as truly bound to obey God as any church-member is; while his condition is the dreadful one of rebellion. But the gospel invites the sinner to mercy. Though he may have sinned long and grossly, he is called to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. To comply with the call and become a believer will not

alter his duty to obey God; but it will remove the responsibility of sin; it will dispose the heart to obedience; it will secure eternal life. Without faith and love to Christ, the sinner is in a miserable condition; bound to obey a law he does not love; summoned to appear at a judgment-seat for which he is not prepared. Continued impenitence and increasing sin and heedless procrastination, are making matters only worse. Let every sinner obey the voice of conscience, of duty, of safety, and of the gospel; let him flee to Christ, the only refuge. He is not a refuge from responsibility and duty—this is not desirable—but the refuge from sin and from wrath as the curse due to sin. This the gospel offers in these simple terms, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and THOU SHALT BE SAVED!"

## THE CHRISTIAN.

Who would not be a Christian? I have seen
Men shrinking from the term, as if it brought
A charge against them! Yet the honoured name
Is full of gentlest meaning.
For 'tis the loftiest name the language bears;
And all the languages, in all the world,
Have none sublimer. It relates to CHRIST,
And breathes of God and holiness; suggests
The virtues of humanity, adorned
By the rich graces of the Holy Ghost,
To fit them for the Paradise on high,
Where angels dwell, and perfect manhood shines,
In the clear lustre of redeeming love,
For ever, and for ever! and implies
A SON, AND HEIR, OF THE ETERNAL GOD.